**Action Research: Implementation and Assessment for Restoration-Based Environmental Education**

UW-Madison Arboretum

Dept of Curriculum and Instruction

Spring/Summer 2012

**Reflective Journal Worksheet & Assignments**

**Your Name: Deb Kralovetz**

**Due by January 30 by 9 a.m.**

What are you interested in researching? Is there an issue you want to address in your classroom or school? What are your assumptions and expectations about your issues? What do you already know about the topic? What are some of your concerns about doing an action research project?

Our group is interested in researching the use and restoration of our school nature center. I would like to specifically write curriculum applicable to language/vocabulary development for my ELL students to scaffold the lessons classroom teachers may be teaching in relation to the nature center. I am thinking our research may involve staff attitudes about the nature center and integrating its use into lessons they have already developed. I expect staff to be open to these ideas since our nature center is established and kids have used it. They understand its value as a teaching tool and resource. My concern about the action research is our short time frame. I feel I need to keep in mind this project is the beginning of a journey…everything cannot happen at once. We need to take small steps to get people back to our nature center.

Instructor Response:

As part of an action research project, in addition to interviews or a focus group or a survey about attitudes, you can also take a look at exiting curriculum as one of your “data collection instruments.” You are absolutely correct about this being a step in a longer journey! Having the 3 of you work together is a great beginning.

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**Due February 13 by 9 a.m.**

Describe what you would like to research or explore for your action research project. What are you curious about? What issue do you want to address?

In my experience, some teachers at my school have developed high quality lessons; however, as the teacher of English Language Learners, I feel many of these lessons lack comprehensible input necessary to make the lesson more understandable for not only ELL students, but other students with learning deficits as well. My interest is two-fold: work with classroom teachers in a co-teaching situation to design lessons that utilize our Nature Center, and to scaffold activities, strategies and methodology within those lessons to support the needs of our diverse learners. My logical starting point for this project would be with my colleagues who are enrolled in this course. In essence, we would form a “Critical Friends” group as referred to in the Bambino article, “Critical Friends.” My goal would be to then share those lessons we have created with other teachers in our school.

Instructor Response:

Great idea! Maybe you could even do a “focus group” with other teachers to get their ideas about activities, strategies, and methodologies, with help from your critical friends colleagues in designing the questions.

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**Due February 27 by 9 a.m.**

What is your Problem Statement ?

English Language Learners in the Denmark School District have the same learning outcome objectives as native English speaking students. ELL students typically lack knowledge of content vocabulary and background information to help them reach these objectives. At this time, most classroom teachers do not use learning strategies known to be successful with ELL students. These students often perform below their peers on science assessments.

Who is affected?

ELL students, myself as the ELL teacher, classroom teachers

Who or what is suspected of causing the problem?

In the area of science, I do not collaborate with classroom teachers regarding unit objectives and learning outcomes. Students’ lack of prior knowledge and difficult content vocabulary inhibit ELL students’ success in science.

What kind of problem is it?

This is a school-wide problem involving students who lack the language base to access the curriculum as it is presented by teachers in the classroom.

What is the goal for improvement?

My goal is to support ELL students to attain science assessment results at the level of their native English-speaking peers, and support teachers by suggesting and modeling strategies to use with ELL students.

What do you propose to do about it?

I would like to collaborate with classroom teachers regarding science objectives and scaffold student learning to ensure success for our ELL students. The scaffolds will include preteaching content vocabulary and providing experiential learning in our school’s nature center.

Instructor Response:

Nice Job! Will you be specifically looking at Science objectives, or will you also look English objectives (like vocabulary) as well. If you are looking at the latter, you may want to include some journaling activities as part of your action plan.

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**Due by March 12 by 9 a.m.**

List at least 3 (or more) peer reviewed journal articles on topics related to the problem that you have found (use APA format; see APA Formatting and Style Guide at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/).

What do you find to be helpful or useful from the articles you found? What’s interesting?

I have changed my research question. My new problem statement is: ELL students’ writing skills are the last of their language skills to develop as they move toward Full English Proficiency. ELL students have difficulty formulating and organizing ideas, putting those ideas into words and using grammatically correct paragraphs and sentences. This often leads to a negative feeling toward writing for ELL students. Denmark Elementary School’s Nature Center is a diamond in the rough on our schoolyard. It is an underused learning resource.

My research question:

How would using our school nature center as a writing environment influence my ELL students’ attitudes about writing and their progress toward English Language proficiency?

Journal articles cited:

Cordell, H. K. (2010). Trends in Viewing and Photographing Wildlife, Birds, Trees and

Scenery. *Internet Research Information Series,* Part I and II.

Harr, N., Lee, R.E. & Jr. (2010). Nature Detectives. *Science and Children,* 48(6), 34-39.

Schultz, M. M. (2009). Effective Writing Assessment and Instruction for Young English

Language Learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal,* 37(1), 57-62.

doi:10.1007/s10643-009-0317-0.

Westervelt, M. (2007). Schoolyard Inquiry for English Language Learners. *Science*

*Teacher,* 74(3), 47-51.

I am finding bits and pieces of each article to have helpful information for my research. I am having difficulty finding research involving all the aspects of my research. I understand I may be exploring a narrow topic., but I feel it precisely addresses my needs and situation.

Several articles address the topic of learning environment to enhance student progress. I believe students will feel empowered to, develop ideas and write. I feel the nature center will offer an atmosphere of creativity and reflective thinking.

Instructor Response:

Action research projects tend to evolve. It great you are getting more specific and honing in on what you want to research. Looks like you found some relevant articles as well. Good Job!

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**Due by March 26 by 9 a.m.**

Write a draft introductory paragraph that includes where the research is taking place, who and/or what is being researched, and what concern or problem is being addressed

Denmark Elementary School is a located in Denmark, Wisconsin, a small community outside of Green Bay. Denmark Elementary School has about 490 students, grades 1-5. Our school grounds contain our Denmark Nature Center which was developed in 2001 by teachers attending Great Lakes Earth Partnership courses. The Nature Center mission statement reads:

The School District of Denmark's students, parents, teachers, support staff and community members will plan, create and restore natural areas on the school property.  These areas will be used for teaching, exploring, appreciating and integrating ethics into the curriculum.  This living laboratory will exist for the enjoyment and life long learning opportunities for the entire community.

As the district English Language Learner teacher, I work with students and teachers across multiple grade levels and in varied content areas. ELL students’ writing skills are the last of their language skills to develop as they move toward Full English Proficiency. ELL students have difficulty formulating and organizing ideas, putting those ideas into words and writing grammatically correct paragraphs and sentences. This often leads to a negative feeling toward writing for ELL students. Denmark Elementary School’s Nature Center is a diamond in the rough on our schoolyard. It is an underused learning resource. I am interested in exploring the possibility of using our Nature Center as a springboard for writing ideas and lessons in order to increase ELL students’ writing proficiency.

Fill out your Data Collection Plan. Include at least 3 data sources.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Research Question** | **Instrument** | **Type of Strategy**  **(Artifacts, Observational Data, or Inquiry Data)** |
| How would using Denmark Nature Center as a writing environment influence my ELL students’ attitudes about writing and their progress toward English Language proficiency in writing? | Pre and post writing sample | artifact-  quantitative |
| Pre and post survey in which students will indicate their attitudes about writing and what they perceive as their strengths and weakness in writing | Inquiry data |
| Student journal writing samples | Artifact-qualitative |

Instructor Response:

Can you describe your nature center a bit more in your introduction (acreage, what kinds of ecosystems, etc.)? Very good job on your data collection plan!

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**All data collection instruments are due by April 12**

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**Due by April 16 by 9 a.m.**

What are some challenges that are emerging about the data collection instruments or process, or overall project? Any ideas about how to address those challenges?

My biggest challenge is finding tome to get outdoors due to the limited time I have with my students, and the spring weather. I am also anticipating that the data I am using for pre- and post- writing assessments may not show a change in student writing progress. Evaluating writing progress for any student, whether native English speaking or not, in this short amount of time can be a challenge.

I have come to the conclusion that I will do the best I can under the circumstances and also base my evaluation of this project on soft data such as student observations and attitudes about writing in the Nature Center.

Instructor Response:

Sounds reasonable – you may also identify some other areas for future inquiry or action when you have more time.

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**Due by April 30 by 9 a.m.**

What other potential action research projects/questions are emerging? What are some other questions that are coming up for you based on your research? What would you want to research next? What are some of your next action steps at your school?

As my students and I spend time in the Nature Center, we are noticing things that need to be done to improve the space—to clean it up and make it more usable. This would take much time and effort. I am wondering how to get staff, students and community involved in the process. First, we need expert advice on which plants can be cut, cleaned, or eliminated from the center without destroying the natural habitat of other living creatures. Our school is implementing a project-based learning initiative. I would like to work with staff to develop some project based learning units involving the Nature Center. In fact, I am registered for a summer class to do that!

Instructor Response:

We conduct work parties here at the Arboretum to maintain our restorations. The first step is to identify the non-native invasive plants, and either pull them out or cut them down. But you have to train people to be able to identify the plants that need to be removed. If I lived near-by, I’d show you how to do it!

We’re glad to hear you have found a way to implement ongoing support for using the Nature Center!

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**Due May 14 by 9 a.m.**

How has this practice befitted your teaching? Describe what went well, what went poorly, or what was a surprise to you during the action research process, separate from the topic.. Have you encountered any personal changes, insights, inconsistencies in practice, struggles, or new ideas for future research during this experience? What would you do differently? What would you do the same?

This project has opened my eyes to the benefits of outdoor education. The biggest surprise to me was the personality change I noticed in my students when we were outdoors. Students who are normally quiet and shy came out of their “shell” outside. They were so excited about discovering and exploring the wonders in our Nature Center. One day last week I had a substitute teacher who took my students outdoors, the next day she stated these same observations. Each day when I pick up my students their first question is, “Are we going outside today?” My goal is to share my project and results with classroom teachers and work together to include outdoor education projects into content and writing activities as we implement the new Common Core State Standards over the next several years. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to do this research and look forward to using it to become a more effective teacher.

Instructor Response:

We are delighted that this action research project went so well for your students. It was really interesting to hear how their confidence improved. We hope you can continue to maximize the use of that Nature Center! Good Luck!

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**Assignment: Class Presentations due on May 14 & May 21**

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**Assignment: Final Reports due & Draft Presentations for EPS Institutes due by May 23**

Use APA format. See APA Formatting and Style Guide at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

Use the Action Research Rubric for guidelines on the report content

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